



State of Louisiana
Department of Environmental Quality



M.J. "Mike" Foster
Governor

L. Hall Bohlinger
Secretary

L. Hall Bohlinger
Secretary
Louisiana Department of Environmental Quality
Statement
News Conference
Thursday, May 22, 2003
Baton Rouge, Louisiana

Good morning and welcome to the Louisiana Department of Environmental Quality. I am Hall Bohlinger, Secretary of DEQ.

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency recently changed the classification of the Greater Baton Rouge area from serious to severe. This is because we did not manage to reduce ozone levels to meet federal standards by the established deadline set by the Clean Air Act. My fellow speakers and I are here together because we all recognize how important it is for the Greater Baton Rouge area to work in unison to reduce activities that lead to the formation of ozone.

Scientific data shows that for the past thirty years, air quality in our state has steadily improved. EPA has set six of what it calls criteria air pollutants, to measure air quality. With the exception of the Greater Baton Rouge area, the rest of the state is in attainment for all six. The Greater Baton Rouge area is in attainment for five of them. The pollutant we are still grappling with in the area is ozone. But even ozone levels have been on the decrease. In the year 2000, our area exceeded ozone levels 11 days. By 2001, the number of days was reduced to one and only two were recorded in 2002. So as you can see, our area was reclassified not because our air quality has worsened, but because we failed to meet the deadline set by the Clean Air Act. Over to my right, you can see a map of where we were with the ozone standard in 1978 and where we are today. Our area, which is highlighted in the map, is known as the five-parish non-attainment area when it comes to ozone related matters.

The EPA reclassification will bring with it the implementation of new measures, some of which will require that we adjust our purse strings as well as our lifestyles. The measures will have an impact on every area resident at a

personal level. However, our fate is not yet sealed. We still have an opportunity to prevent some of these onerous new requirements from taking hold in our area...If we work together. And work together we will.

DEQ in its role as the environmental state agency and also in its capacity as part of the Baton Rouge Clean Air Coalition is doubling the efforts of the Coalition to raise public awareness and elevate the level of cooperation in the battle against ozone. To this end, the Capital Region Clean Air Campaign has been created. The campaign is titled, "We Can (Clean the Air Now)," the slogan of the campaign is "Do Your Share For Cleaner Air." Its objective is to stress how crucial it is for each one of us to be mindful of how our daily activities impact air quality in the area and what great benefits await all of us if we all do our share for cleaner air this summer season. The campaign is looking to promote the right mix of collaborative and individual efforts to bring the area into attainment.

A number of public outreach activities are taking place at all levels. Governor Foster has already alerted state agencies to participate in the Baton Rouge area's Ozone Action Program. All the parish presidents have been very active in speaking to key groups to explain the root of the problem and request cooperation. The members of the DEQ Ozone Awareness Outreach Team, who you see here in T-Shirts, will be going out and are available to participate in public forums to provide the public with information about what each one of us can do to help avoid a classification that, in practice, we do not deserve. You can see some of those tips in the poster over to my left. We would like to see these tips applied as part of a daily routine and not just on days when ozone action alerts are issued. We want to drive the message home that by incorporating these tips into our daily lives, we will be helping to clean our air now and in the future. One of the most important tips in the list is number 10. "SPREAD THE WORD."

As I have already said, the campaign is looking to promote the right mix of collaborative and individual efforts to bring the area into attainment and the effort should not rely solely on individual actions. For this reason, I have also sent a letter to area industry asking them to be mindful of our attainment situation and to conduct a review of their operations to see what opportunities might be available to curtail or reduce activities that produce ozone-forming pollutants.

We want to use every tool available to garner everyone's cooperation in bringing the area into attainment to avoid a reclassification. But we should not lose sight of the fact that attainment of this standard also brings important benefits such as cleaner air and an improved regulatory environment for economic development.

As I told my fellow speakers when I asked them to join me here today, we have an opportunity this season to write the Greater Baton Rouge area success story. I think that if we obtain everyone's cooperation we stand a pretty good chance.

Now I want to turn the microphone over to Mike McDaniel, Executive Director of the Baton Rouge Clean Air Coalition.